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CURRENT INTELLIGENCE WEEKLY REVIEW

25 February 1960

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TO BAY OF PIGS

CUBAN ARMS PURCHASES

Expanding economic and political ties between Cuba and the UAR may facilitate the Castro government's efforts to obtain military aircraft and increase its already substantial purchases of arms and ammunition. The purchase of obsolescent UAR planes might reduce any inclination by Castro to press the USSR for MIGs under the new trade agreement signed during Mikoyan's visit to Havana earlier this month.

[redacted] aircraft, arms, and pilot training the UAR can make available in an arrangement which seems to have been sparked by Cuban leader Che Guevara and UAR Deputy Foreign Minister Sabri. The UAR is willing to sell Cuba at world prices at least 23 British-made jet fighters, numerous lighter planes, and bombs and ammunition for each type. At Cuba's request, 30 to 50 Cuban students will be accepted at the UAR aviation college on 1 September.

Sabri, who will visit Havana in March, may sign a three-year trade agreement which could be used for further arms transactions. The US army attaché in Cairo has heard that Czech arms and ammunition will be sent to Cuba under a recent $6,000,000 UAR-Cuban barter deal. A Cuban arms technician reportedly arrived in Cairo from Prague on 8 February to make final arrangements on a three-way trade in which a large part of the Egyptian cotton bartered for Cuban sugar would be sent to Czechoslovakia in payment for arms. Other reports of Cuban attempts to buy Czech planes, tanks, and arms continue to be received, but they vary widely in detail.

Meanwhile, the creation in Havana on 20 February of a central planning board to supervise and coordinate national economic affairs will give Castro, Guevara, and the National Agrarian Reform Institute more direct control over remaining private enterprise in Cuba.

Proof that at least one of the continuing bombing flights over Cuba did originate in the United States is reportedly causing strong and hostile reactions among the Cuban people, who believe the US Government could prevent such flights.

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A HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM
RELEASE AS SANITIZED
1997

[redacted]

A HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM RELEASE AS SANITIZED 1997

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INVOLVEMENT TO BAY OF PIGS

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LATIN AMERICAN ATTITUDES TOWARD CASTRO REGIME

Fidel Castro's regime has lost prestige in other Latin American capitals because of its authoritarian methods at home, its susceptibility to Communist influence, and its unorthodox behavior in hemisphere affairs. Only a few Latin American leaders, however, are prepared to dismiss Castro as a mere radical demagogue who has lost all chance of making in the long run a positive contribution to Cuba; for many Latin Americans in general, particularly the less sophisticated, Castro remains an important political symbol. His proclaimed objectives parallel those of numerous groups throughout the hemisphere, and concerted Cuban efforts to appeal to dissatisfied and oppressed groups in many countries may be making headway.

Castro's Tactics

The Castro regime has rapidly dissipated the considerable good will it enjoyed among Latin American leaders when it assumed power in January 1959. The authoritarian tactics that belie Castro's proclaimed democratic ideals quickly became apparent and have progressively eroded the Cuban leader's prestige among democratically oriented Latin American governments.

On 22 January of this year, Venezuelan President Betancourt asked two Cuban diplomats why elections have not been scheduled by Castro and why the Cuban press has been intimidated. He said the situations in Cuba and the Dominican Republic were becoming more similar every day.

President Lopez Mateos of Mexico has publicly expressed regret that the Cuban revolution is not proceeding according to constitutional paths. The responsible press and government officials in Argentina, Uruguay, Colombia, Costa Rica, and other countries are showing increasing disgust with the undemocratic attitudes and actions of Cuban leaders.

Communist Influence

The growth of Communist influence in Cuba is another cause for serious concern in Latin American capitals. Although few officials consider Fidel Castro a Communist, many are convinced that close aides such as Che Guevara and Raul Castro are promoting Communist objectives and that the premier himself is in danger of becoming a captive of the Communists. The Mikoyan visit this month and the resulting close economic ties seem to have further alarmed Latin American observers.

The Liberal party's El Tiempo in Colombia declared that the Mikoyan visit will "fortify the influence, already considerable, of Communism in the government, with all that this signifies." President Betancourt of Venezuela is reported "very disturbed" at the implications of the Cuban-Soviet agreement.

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Unorthodox Diplomacy

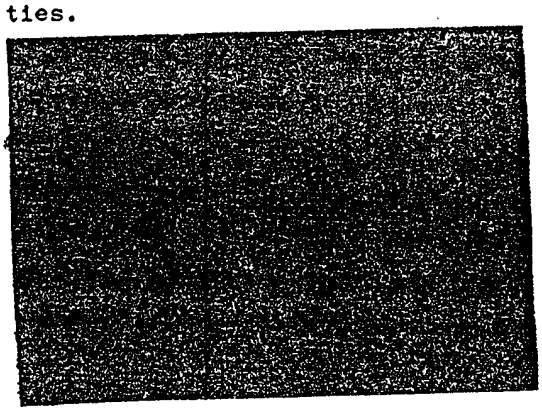
Castro's diplomatic representatives, many of them young, inexperienced, and imbued with revolutionary fervor, have irritated a number of Latin American governments by their unorthodox behavior and blatant propaganda activities. His ambassadors in El Salvador and Venezuela had to be recalled late last year because of their indiscretions. Cuban envoys in Bolivia, Honduras, Guatemala, and Panama have irritated the governments or important political groups by becoming involved in domestic affairs. The Chilean and Venezuelan governments formerly protested the unannounced and undocumented arrivals of Cuban military planes in their countries last summer and fall.

Attitude Toward OAS

Numerous Latin American leaders fear that the Castro regime's indifferent and occasionally hostile attitude toward the Organization of American States (OAS) and other inter-American organizations will weaken hemispheric cooperation. Direct Cuban support for revolutionary movements opposing the regimes in the Dominican Republic and Nicaragua last summer was in defiance of the ardently professed Latin American principle of nonintervention.

Fidel Castro attacked the meeting of foreign ministers in Santiago de Chile last August as a "farce," and Raul Castro described the OAS as a "worthless organization" unresponsive to the real interests of the people. More recently, Cuban officials have ridiculed the new Inter-American Development Bank as of little use because of its alleged domination by the United States; Cuba is the only Latin American country not to become a member.

Latin Americans look askance at the Cuban Government's efforts to identify itself with the Asian-African neutralists, and have been definitely cool toward Castro's proposal to hold a world conference of "hungry nations" in Havana late next summer. They doubt Cuban assurances that the conference is to be purely economic and technical. Cuba has been unable to secure the agreement of any Latin American government to cosponsor the conference, and only Mexico, Venezuela, and possibly Panama have agreed--even conditionally--to send representatives. Most countries oppose holding the conference but may feel obliged to attend if many Latin American governments do so. Brazil regards it as a direct threat to the success of Operation Pan America, its plan for strengthening inter-American ties.



In another move which threatens hemispheric solidarity, Cuba has been actively campaigning in the UN for election to the Security Council, without first asking customary support from the Latin American caucus. Several Latin American countries had already indicated approval of a prior Chilean bid for caucus support, but Cuba's candidacy seems to have elicited some Latin American support too. Cuba's move will probably lessen caucus effectiveness on other issues as well.

US-Cuban Relations

Many leading Latin Americans, including some who have their own strong grievances against US policies, have expressed surprise at the

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bitterness of Castro's invective against the United States. The Uruguayan newspaper Accion --mouthpiece for the leftist politician Luis Batlle Berres, who has been an especially caustic critic of the United States--warned Castro not to lose contact with his liberal-minded friends in the United States. Venezuelan President Betancourt in his candid remarks to the two Castro emissaries in late January, pointedly asked what purpose could be served by the Cuban attacks on the United States and on foreign capital.

The majority of Latin American leaders approve the moderation of President Eisenhower's 26 January statement on Cuba and have indicated admiration and relief that it was basically conciliatory. Chilean President Alessandri and Colombian President Lleras Camargo in January declared they understood the US Government was under considerable provocation but expressed the belief that any punitive steps or anything resembling force against Castro would strengthen rather than weaken him. They counseled continued moderation and patience.

The widely respected Chilean diplomat Benjamin Cohen has expressed a viewpoint probably shared by many thoughtful Latin American leaders who believe that Castro has not yet lost all opportunity of making, on balance, a positive contribution to Cuba. Cohen pointed out in mid-February that the Cuban situation must be viewed in the context of a drastic social revolution, with its inevitable violence and disorganization, and that the issue of Communism is only incidental to this central fact.

The newspaper El Pais, owned by Panamanian President de la Guardia, published somewhat similar views: "The balance of history is, up to now, favorable. The new Cuba shows a a series of victories, which, without doubt, any other Latin American country would have taken much longer to achieve. Every revolution has its mistakes--and necessary bloodshed."

Honduran President Villeda Morales, whose former strident leftism has been substantially modified since he became President and who is a close friend of the United States, believes that the Castro regime will learn from experience to adopt more moderate methods.

Appeal in Latin America

Castro's appeal as a political symbol was stressed by the Honduran President in a recent private conversation in which he voiced sentiments probably shared by many Latin Americans although seldom expressed directly to Americans. Villeda referred to Cuba as "the focal point of Latin American aspirations toward freedom from the overwhelming shadow of United States power and toward full expression of Latin American cultural and social independence." The general feeling of inferiority in dealing with the United States probably has a large part in the dramatic appeal Castro apparently holds for many Latin Americans.

In addition, the picture of Castro as a courageous fighter against a corrupt dictatorship is still valid for many Latin American people, especially the less sophisticated. Castro's drastic agrarian reform program and his controls over private capital also evoke a sympathetic response in a continent where abusive social practices by a small wealthy class are frequent. Communists, always quick to exploit Latin American grievances, have become, along with such Communist-influenced parties as the Chilean Socialist party, Castro's most uncritical defenders in the hemisphere.

Although Castro has alienated the top leaders of important Latin American

leftist-nationalist non-Communist parties such as APRA of Peru, Democratic Action of Venezuela, and National Liberation of Costa Rica, sympathy for Castro remains strong in the lower echelons of these parties. An APRA rally on 7 January revealed strong discontent among secondary party leaders, youths, students, and the more radical elements because of the moderate policies of the party leadership and its refusal to come out strongly in favor of Castro and advocate Castro-type policies for Peru.

President Betancourt, head of the Venezuelan party, is faced with a similar dilemma, as is former Costa Rican President Figueres, head of the National Liberation party, who publicly broke with Castro last April. These leaders--who are perhaps more bitterly disillusioned with Castro because they once aided him and pinned great hopes on him--have tried to distinguish between Castro and the Cuban revolution by continuing to support the revolution while refusing to endorse Castro's methods. This distinction, however, eludes most party members.

The Castro regime seems well aware of its large reservoir of sympathy among presently disorganized and less articulate groups in many countries. Havana's diplomatic representatives, Cuban labor groups, and the Castro-subsidized news agency Prensa Latina are embarked on a concerted campaign to appeal to the masses over the heads of the governments. The Cuban ambassador to Panama is reported to have stated that "the primary mission of the new Cuban diplomacy is to spread the gospel of the Cuban revolution among the people in those countries still ruled by dictators and oligarchies."

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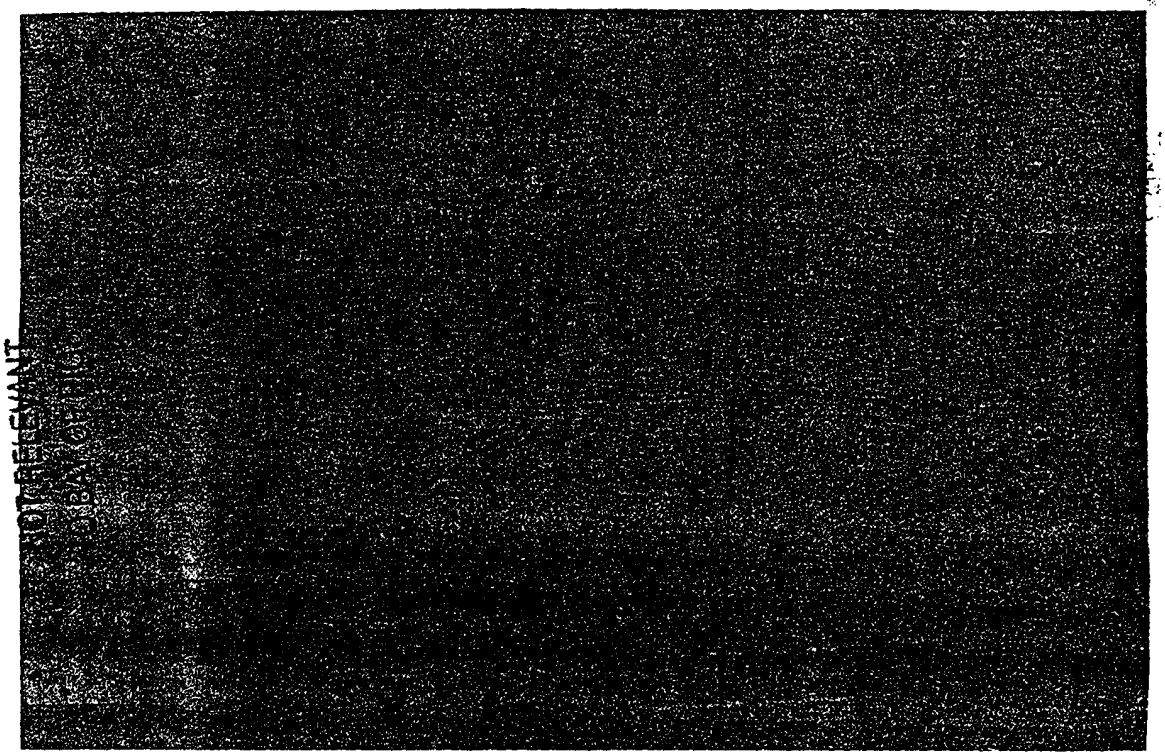

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